Environmental Studies
Assessment Progress Report
Fall 2009

Reviewing Our Established Assessment Areas
(1) Senior thesis projects and papers;
(2) Oral presentations on senior theses;
(3) Comprehensive exams (overall and individual sections);
(4) Course activities.

Environmental Studies Majors of the Class of 2009
Three students completed all of their degrees requirements and graduated with majors in Environmental Studies in 2009, two in the Science Concentration, and one in the Policy & Values Concentration. A fourth student carried over into the class of 2010.

Reviewing the Four Assessment Areas for the 2008/2009 Academic Year
(1) Senior Thesis Projects and Papers. We use the final grades in these courses to assess how students performed in this aspect of the curriculum. The grades in 2009 were as follows: one D and two B pluses. We discussed what we are learning about this requirement and about the quality of student work.

Action items that resulted from our discussion:

- Review goals for thesis courses and make clear the requirement for self-motivated, independent work
- Determine how to grade more than just the final paper. Allow for midterm grades by including graded components along the way to the final grade.
- Require attendance at a majority of science colloquia
- Review what it really means to "grade down" between the draft and the revised final paper.

(2) Oral presentations on senior theses. We deem these to be satisfactory or not. This tends to be an "on the spot" qualitative assessment of the presentation. All three students gave a satisfactory performance in 2009.
We discussed what we are learning about this requirement and about the quality of student work.

Action items that resulted from our discussion:

- Clarify if presentation is part of grade received for thesis course
- Discuss whether we should have a "distinctive" category for presentation in the comprehensive evaluation
- Review criteria for grading the presentation, specifically, style versus content
- A practice talk should be required and should be part of the grade

(3) Comprehensive Exams (overall and individual sections). We discussed the results in the table below. As our sample size for the class of 2009 was small, data from 2008 and 2007 were also included in the table .

	Overall Score (%)	Section Scores Marked Out of 10						
		Gen 1	Gen 2	Stats	Calcs	"Topics"	Intro Econ	Inter Econ
Student 1	*74*	10	5	10	5	7	7	8
Student 2	*89*	10	10	8	8	10	7	9
Student 3	*67*	7	5	2	8	10	7	8
Student 4	*61*	6	6.5	9	4	4	7	6
Student 5	*93*	9	9	10	10	10	8.5	8.5
Student 6	*77*							
Student 7	*72*	8	8	4	6	9	8.5	7
Student 8	*90*	9	9	10	9	9.5	9	7.5
Student 9	*92*	9	10	10	8	10	9	8.5

Our stated goal is that our majors should earn 75% or better on this exam overall, as well as in the individual sections. What do the data tell us about this? They tell us that for the most part this assessment criterion is being met. Naturally an occasional student doesn't do well in a particular section or in the exam overall, but this the exception rather than the rule, and there is no clear pattern in which sections of the exam are not meeting expectations.

Action items that resulted from our discussion:

- We need to review the exam and make sure it reflects what we are currently teaching

(4) Course activities. Ann Herzig provided some summary data on a variety of activities in ENVR 101, ENVR 102 and ENVR 203 in recent years for us to discuss. These are our "core" ENVR listings. We decided not to examine ENVR 101 data, as it is a large course with a very diverse array of student who take it. Activities examined included exams, readings, presentations and discussions, among other things.

Ann provided ENVR 102 data from 2008 and 2009 and ENVR 203 data from 2007 and 2008. We looked to see if 70% of the students achieved a passing grade on all assessed activities, which they certainly did.

Small Sample Size

We acknowledged that the small sample size we are dealing with in terms of numbers of majors means that data in any given year is highly dependent on the individual students involved. The Middle States Evaluation Committee has also recognized this problem in small majors, which they indicate leads to "performance appraisal" rather than program assessment *per se*. Cindy Speaker suggested we combine data over years, which is what I did above for the results of the comprehensive exams, and what we also did in the 'course activities' section above.

Post-Graduation Assessment

Some student outcomes are reflected 5 plus years after graduation (also pointed out by the Middle States Commission). I have information from many of our alums on their careers to date. I could compile this information at some point in the future. How should I compile it and what would it tell us about the program we are offering? We could also survey these former students to find out how they now value and judge the preparation they got at Wells. This is potentially something to pursue in the future.

Other Information

Between 2008 and 2009, Ann adopted some changes in ENVR 102, in order to address some problems she had identified in the course. These changes are described below. They were particularly in the areas of information gathering and critical thinking. Some of Ann's changes will be applicable to the course, regardless of the instructor.

For information-gathering skills, she worked with a librarian to give students an overview of how to use the Wells College library's website. This included how to do searches for information from different kinds of sources, how to distinguish primary, scholarly sources from secondary ones (and why Wikipedia falls into the second

category), and overall search strategies. She also incorporated information-gathering throughout the course, by asking students to find additional sources on class topics and requiring students to gather outside information on take-home essay exams rather than letting them rely only on class notes and the textbook. In addition she conducted "campus greening projects" in a more directed way.

For critical thinking, she has always emphasized the development of critical thinking in her courses. She typically gives the students readings with different conclusions or opposing viewpoints to get them to recognize things that will help them evaluate the opposing views: author background, author affiliation, inflammatory language, vague unsubstantiated statements, lack of concrete information, use of poor sources, underlying assumptions, bias, etc. To improve the students' abilities to critically evaluate writing based on these types of criteria, she began providing discussion questions that ask for these types of observations *before* the class discussion, and requiring that they hand in their answers beforehand. She thinks this was more effective because it directed their thinking to be more critical while they were reading rather than after-the-fact. An important outcome of this exercise was to get the students to learn how to make up their own minds; part of this includes recognizing that the answers are not always clear.